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IMAGINATIONS AS CULTIVATED BY THE TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY.

AN able paper appeared some time ago, in the *Parents' Review*, on the importance of Imagination in teaching. It is a very interesting subject, for on reflection one would be inclined to contest that no good teaching of geography or of history could be possible without a strong power of imagination. In order to teach geography, for instance, it is possible to fill a pupil's head with a certain number of words and figures, which have to be reproduced at an examination by a pure effort of memory. This done, the pupil is supposed to have mastered a branch of the subject, and his mind to be decidedly the richer, possessed mentally of a large tract of country. But it is not so at all. His mind is possessed of two pages of a geography book and certain outlines on a map—and that is *geography*.

To take an illustration:—The question is asked, what is the mountainous system of England? *Answer*: It consists of the Pennine Range, the Cumbrian Group, and the Devonian System. Very good. Point them out on the Map? *Answer*: Here they are. *Question*: What is the highest peak in England? *Answer*: Sca-fell, 3,229 feet. Now what is to be said against that? It is pure solid information. No nonsense about imagination. These things are facts. Exactly. But the difference of *capacity to apprehend a fact* is infinite. You cannot bring these mountains bodily before your pupil, and so, to impress them on his mind, you must give him a mental picture. First, you must ascertain whether your pupils have ever been out of a town, and whether they have ever seen great heights. To measure one foot from the floor and then tell your pupils to imagine three thousand of these feet would convey the very vaguest notion of something high up.

But can they imagine breadth, and consistence at the same time? You must put a picture into their minds if the mountain is to become real. To do this without the artist's brush, it is sometimes easiest to put some figure of their own age into the foreground. Then let this hero prepare for an excursion. Describe the setting out in the cool dawn, before sunrise, the dew on the grass and the daisies, the mist hiding the distance, the freshness of the morning and the labourers starting along the same road to their avocations. Is it a manufacturing city lying to your right? Are the streams black with dye? Are the chimneys grimy and frequent? See! you rise higher. Is the ground white with chalk, dazzling the eyes, or glistening with spar, or dark and heavy with granite? Are there sheep feeding? Is it a mining district? Can you see the old air shafts? You notice that gorse and heather are taking the place of other flowers lower down. You mount higher, and the fir trees lie black in the distance. There are sparkling lonely tarns and horrible precipices. Higher yet, higher than many church towers piled one upon the top of the other, as the old fairy tale hath it, and then you enter the mists and wander among the rocks. Who contested these heights long ago? What people fought over these very paths where now only shepherds pass? What wolves prowled where only rabbits frisk to-day?

Can you imitate the speech of the dwellers among these crags? See their cottages, share their rude meal, and see how they live. Hear of the storms and snows of winter, of the dangers of the night mist. Then at length, standing on the peak, tell what counties you see lying below you, and what the vast human beehive is doing on every side. *Now* tell us the name of the great mountain, and of the heights around; tell how many feet you stand above the sea, glittering there beyond, and your group or range is far more certainly in your pupil's memory and knowledge than if he had written the names and numbers ten times over. A bit of its history, an old legend connected with it, will treble the interest and help the memory.

We speak feelingly, having suffered many things at the hands of many geographers, not the least being the learning of all the mountains and rivers of Germany by heart from a dictated manuscript written in German.

What is done for English geography may be done for Egypt, or Japan, or Mexico. Thoroughly good maps and pictures of a country, and an animated lecture in the school-room during an hour, would produce far better fruits than the learning of names and numbers over and over again for an hour.

No one who has seen the delight of a boy over a book of wanderings and adventure can doubt that in that book are points that appeal to him—and, taken to pieces, the book is largely geographical, and often, in these days, remarkably instructive. Given a certain tract of country, the author has peopled it with probable inhabitants, who have possible adventures, with actually existing animals, and who discover fruits and products, sports and dangers, which actually exist.

It is wonderful how much the teacher, by consulting books of reference, maps and engravings, can construct of a picture to put before the pupil's eyes. What child would not hate the Taunus Mountains and the Schwarzwald with a perfect hatred as long as they only existed in a German dictation book? But oh, the delight when they rise in old tales in all their grandeur of rock and forest, of firs and pines, of legend and song! What a difference between the bare fact that the inhabitants excel in wood carving, and toy making, and a picture of the old German kitchen at night, with the family gathered round the big stove, each busy with a toy to cut, or a wonderful animal to shape, or a beautiful casket to create out of a block of wood!

It may be objected that such teaching means immense labour for the teacher. Not at all: only labour of another kind. Instead of the labour of going over that geography page again and again, insisting on a verbatim recital, or on a written digest of all the principal facts, *ad nauseam*, it means mastering the subject till *you* feel an enthusiastic interest in "all about it." Give *your* imagination leave to revel in the real facts, that is,—don't put a slate quarry on the chalk hills, but clothe these bare bones of fact with odds and ends of *real* interest, which are frequently evolved naturally out of the subject, and you will wonder at your own delight in it, and the *enthusiasm in you* will gain your audience; for children are usually wonderfully sympathetic auditors. If your subject wearies you, and eludes your

vision, they will find it tiresome too. In teaching history, imagination is really indispensable.

Is there any period since the making of the world which had not its great characters, its grand deeds and pathetic stories? We cannot chronicle all. But of all horrible *instructive* inventions (except as books of reference), some of the most horrible are the so-called "histories," which are lists of kings, battles and dates, with here and there a note, such as "printing invented, A.D., so and so," "Mahomet flourished," or "side-saddles first used." It is just killing centuries, and erecting tombs of *ennui* above them.

No wonder people say, "oh, history is *so dry*!" Here and there a dramatist has rescued some noble character from oblivion, and made it live again in all its power and individuality. You see the man stand among his people, you think the thoughts and feel the feelings of that age. You get hot with the passion of the south, or cool and daring with the energy of the north. The whole life and surroundings of the man rise again. *That* is history. And where the teacher can take some great living figure, some actor in the world's history, and clothe him in the garments of his time, and in the flesh and blood, coloured by his climate and race, and can describe his actions among the scenery and the surroundings of his age, he is sure to *captivate attention*, and teach naturally.

Probably, also, it is a great mistake to say, "ah! *I* have no imagination; I can teach what is in a book, but I cannot romance." But is it not possible, by a simple course of thought, to *educate imagination*?

A power of description often means remembering, in groups, things which would naturally be deduced from each other.

If, for example, you want to teach your pupil the history of a great inundation, and its effect upon the people, and the country devastated by it, you might teach him to describe it.

First, one has to know if it be in a mountainous or flat country; a populous or deserted district; in a hot climate or a cold one; the time of year; and the general character of the country, soil and products. Suppose it to be in the north; then you must conclude either that the sea comes sweeping in, or that the water has been gathering among rocks and mountains in innumerable mountain-streams, and swollen by snows or rains, has overflowed the small courses down the

hill sides, bearing, among the rattling stones, tufts of herbage and broken branches, which are hurled into the centre stream. Fed on all sides by foaming rushing cataracts, the water will be discoloured, it will be flung against barriers of rock or of fallen trees, and with accumulated wrath wrench them away with a burst and a roar. Tumbling and seething down, the dull hoarse voice of the waters may be heard for miles as it sweeps on, high above its usual channel, rolling with it the bodies of animals, the roofs of houses, furniture, and even human beings, living or dead; and gradually over the fields, and the roads and villages, spreads one great expanse of rushing, seething water.

There are immense quantities of detail which a little thought will supply by natural sequence. Take now the slow rising of the Nile under the blue skies of Egypt; the earthy colour of the water in a stoneless basin; the flight of the people and their animals from the expected flood—and its slow subsidence, and the great plains of alluvial mud, the first hideousness of slime and crawling things, and then the brilliant green. If a child's mind is taught to make pictures for itself it will soon learn.

Is it not Ruskin who says that true imagination always rests on very accurate knowledge and observation; and that simple exaggeration and untrustworthiness of statement (pulling the long bow) are not imagination?

It is the understanding of this principle which will teach the child to discern between the true and the false. As one describes a river, so one may describe a nation or an individual. You need to know race and temperament, education and civilization. Almost every nation has its known characteristics. Some excel in cunning, others in courage; some in philosophy, others in exact science, and according to these things will be the effect of an event upon them.

If one wants to make a child think of, nay—*see* these differences in his mind's eye, we must do as the great painters do and *present contrasts* to him. Let him see the proud dark face of the Roman governor, robed in his toga, to whom is brought the fair-haired barbarian from the race of the Vikings. Show him the two contemporary kings, Charlemagne and Caliph Haroun Alraschid, in all their

differences of race and surroundings, and their likeness of wisdom. Put colour and life into it all, it needs nothing but *thought*, and consulting a few books. We must never forget the setting of a picture. The fault in much teaching of history is that separate characters (even if anything but a mere name) or separate events in the history of a people, are described, but left isolated. A picture of brilliant colour or sunlight must always have its depth of shadow to correspond*, or the light and colour lose their value entirely, and so in putting a picture before the mind of a pupil, the higher the light on one particular figure, the more careful must be the shadows and half-lights, and the more effective the contrasts.

It is frequently the custom to take the principal episodes in the history of one country, and go through them century by century, almost entirely without reference to what is going on all around. The consequence is an entire blindness to the *proportional* importance of events. But if the imagination is trained to describe a picture thoroughly it will not shirk the shadows and distances.

"The fierce light that beats upon a throne," often blinds the historian's eyes to the gigantic figures in the shadow.

Take our Henry the Eighth, for example, as his reign is usually taught. The pupil follows him all through his much-married life; and his burly figure, with all the unhappy ladies in a row, so fills the foreground that there is barely room for Wolsey and Martin Luther to be crushed in the corner; and, almost invisible, in the background loom the great shades of Michael Angelo, Raphael, Holbein, Melancthon, Charles V., Cortez, Barbarossa, Copernicus, Ariosto, and a crowd of others.

Fat Henry, as represented by Holbein, is, no doubt, a great personage; but his nephew, ally, or rival, Charles V., so intimately connected with him in all his career, is surely no less so. And the other great men of this time, and all the great revolutions in Europe—the taking of Rome, the revolt of Genoa, the massacre at Stockholm, are quite invisible on our historical canvas.

It may very reasonably be objected that in teaching the

* Charles Kingsley in "*Hypatia*" gives a fine example of the value of light, shade, setting and colour of contemporaneous history.

history of England one is not teaching the history of Europe, and that such erratic flights of the imagination are quite out of place. But, when British soldiers are sent on a foreign campaign, the historian should surely follow them? and England sided once with Francis I., of France, then with Charles, of Germany, then again with Francis. Henry quarrelled with Leo X., of Rome, as did so many others; and, in fact, all Europe was in a ferment, and the influence of the Lombards and Venetians on our own trade—as well as that of the Portuguese and Spanish discoveries—was incalculable. To take, therefore, the figure of Henry out of his setting among European politics, is to get an entirely wrong view of history.

"But," you will say, "to impress all the action on so large a stage, upon the mind of a child, is impossible;" and this is just where imagination, based upon the connecting links of fact, steps in. Describe some of these important personages in action *together*, and they will be remembered together. Depict, for instance, the splendid court of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain when the poor Italian sailor who was to discover America, was brought before them. Imagine how the courtiers' tongues would wag over the "mad ideas" of Columbus, and how two little Spanish Infantas, Juana and Katherina, would hear their solemn duennas discussing the amount of favour shown to the discoverer by Queen Isabella. And how perhaps the dark eyes of these little royal children would rest on Columbus, and remember his brown intelligent face years afterwards, when the road to the New World was found, and the two infantas were separated by many miles, one to be the wife of Henry VIII. of England, and mother of unhappy Mary Tudor; the other to marry Philip of Austria and become the mother of Charles V.

Now, can one not imagine another picture? The Vatican in Rome, with Raphael Sanzio lying on boards high up near the roof—his beloved model beside him—executing with rapid brush those pictures still unequalled in our day, while below stalks angry Leo X. discussing the German monk, Martin Luther, and the attitude of the different sovereigns of Europe with regard to the authority of the Holy See, Henry of England, still loyal, is the "Defender of the Faith," and the great annual revenue of Peter's Pence from England has

not yet diminished as it soon will do, but unquiet times for Rome have begun.

In this way imagination teaches both child and teacher to *think*, the mind gets room to turn, and free itself from the fetters of routine and *ennui*, and the child thus taught will understand pictures, poems and the classics, far more quickly when the time comes for wider reading.

M. P.